

Message Text

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SUBJECT: TINDEMANS RETAINS POPULARITY DESPITE RECESSION
AND COALITION BICKERING

BEGIN UNCLASSIFIED

SUMMARY. INDEPENDENT PUBLIC OPINION POLL SHOWS PRIME MINISTER TINDEMANS CONTINUES TO GET GOOD MARKS FROM BELGIAN PUBLIC DESPITE CONTINUING ECONOMIC SLUMP AND AN UNRULY GOVERNMENT COALITION. FORTY-FIVE PERCENT OF THOSE POLLED THOUGHT TINDEMANS' STANDING HAD IMPROVED IN PAST SIX MONTHS-MORE THAN TWICE THOSE WHO THOUGHT HE HAD SLIPPED. TINDEMANS' GOVERNMENT GOT GOOD MARKS FOR PERFORMANCE FROM 35 PERCENT OF THOSE POLLED AS AGAINST 17 PERCENT WITH NEGATIVE JUDGMENT. END SUMMARY.

1. RECENT POLL BY INDEPENDENT INSOP PUBLIC OPINION RESEARCH INSTITUTE SHOWS PRIME MINISTER TINDEMANS CONTINUES TO ENJOY FAVORABLE OPINION AMONG LARGE SEGMENT OF BELGIAN POPULATION EVEN THOUGH HIS GOVERNMENT IS HAVING A DIFFICULT TIME IN PARLIAMENT. OF THOSE POLLED THROUGHOUT COUNTRY 45.2 PERCENT THOUGHT HIS STANDING HAD IMPROVED WHILE ONLY 21.6 SAW HIM DECLINING; 21.9 SAW HIS POSITION UNCHANGED; 10.3 HAD NO OPINION AND ONLY 1.9 PERCENT DID NOT KNOW HIM.

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2. HIS CLOSEST RIVAL IS MINFINANCE WILLY DE CLERCQ WHO RECEIVED FOLLOWING RESPECTIVE SCORES: 31.4, 16.7, 32.7, 14.8 AND 4.2. AMONG OTHERS ON POLLERS' LIST ONLY SOCIALIST ON THE RISE WAS HENRI SIMONET, VICE PRESIDENT OF EC COMMISSION, WHO IS SLATED TO RETURN TO BELGIAN POLITICAL SCENE IN 1976. SOME 16.6 PERCENT SAW HIS STANDING IMPROVING WHILE 15 PERCENT THOUGHT HE HAD DECLINED; 31.6 SAW NO CHANGE; AND 11.5 PERCENT DID NOT KNOW HIM.

3. MINDEFENSE VANDEN BOEYNANTS WAS THE GOVERNMENT LEADER MOST IN DECLINE IN PUBLIC ESTEEM. ONLY 10.7 SAW HIS STANDING IMPROVING AND 35.3 SAW HIS POSITION DECLINING, WHILE 35.7 SAW NO CHANGE. AFTER TINDEMANS, HE IS THE BEST-KNOWN POLITICIAN IN BELGIUM-UNKNOWN TO ONLY 2.5 PERCENT.

4. IN SAME POLL, ACTION OF GOVERNMENT WAS JUDGED AT "VERY GOOD" OR "FAIRLY GOOD" BY 35 PERCENT OF THOSE POLLED. WHILE IT WAS JUDGED "FAIRLY BAD" OR "VERY BAD" BY 17 PERCENT. THIS REPRESENTS A SLIGHT WEAKENING OF FAVORABLE ATTITUDE TOWARD GOVERNMENT SINCE MAY, 1975 WHEN SAME QUESTION WAS ASKED. HOWEVER, THOSE CRITICIZING GOVERNMENT ALSO DECREASED WHILE NUMBER OF THOS WITHOUT OPINION INCREASED FROM 3.1 TO 14.5. GOVERNMENT RECEIVED LOWEST MARKS IN THE ECONOMIC POLICY FIELD WHERE 35 PERCENT SAW GOVERNMENT ACTION AS "FAIRLY BAD" TO "VERY BAD".

END UNCLASSIFIED

5. COMMENT: POLL RESULTS UNDERLINE THE FACT THAT THE STRONGEST ASSET IN THE PRESENT TINDEMANS GOVERNMENT IS THE PERSONAL POPULARITY OF ITS LEADER. THE NEGATIVE JUDGMENT OF GOVERNMENT'S HANDLING OF RECESSION AND THE SHARP RISE IN PROPORTION OF "DON'T KNOWS" IN JUDGING GOVERNMENT'S PERFORMANCE OVERALL NEVERTHELESS UNDERLINE THE FACT THAT GOVERNMENT IS FAR FROM MASTERING THE TROUBLESOME POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC PROBLEMS CURRENTLY AFFLICTING BELGIUM. (COMPREHENSIVE AIRGRAM REPORT TO FOLLOW).FIRESTONE

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